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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 000632

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [GH](#)

SUBJECT: RULING PARTY WINS FOURTH BY-ELECTION IN A ROW

Classified By: Polchief Richard Kaminski, reason 1.5(B/D).

NPP Wins Big

1. (U) On March 25 the Ruling NPP party won its fourth consecutive by-election since assuming power in January of 2001, handily defeating the leading opposition candidate of the NDC, and two small party candidates. By a vote of 12,220 to 4,929 for the NDC (with 3,705 for the PNC candidate and 241 for the DPP nominee), the NPP retained the far northern constituency of Navrongo. While the NPP parliamentary majority remains slim (102 NPP MPs to 90 for the NDC, with seven small party and independent MPs split between the two), the strength of the victory underscores the present dominance of the NPP, which is able to marshal significantly superior resources and play local politics to perfection.

Powers of Incumbency

2. (U) Since the advent of the Fourth Republic in 1993, the Navrongo constituency has been hotly contested between the NPP and NDC, the seat changing hands several times in very close votes in both general and by-elections (required this time after the NPP MP perished in a car accident several months ago). In anticipation of another close contest, the NPP national executive set up shop in the Navrongo constituency well before any of the other parties, and conducted an intensive door-to-door campaign from start to finish. The Vice President, Aliu Mahama, a northerner, scoured the constituency the final two full days of the campaign, opening projects, promising assistance, and pressing for support. Teams of workers from the Electricity Company of Ghana busied themselves hooking up electricity to small and previously neglected communities up to the day before the vote. On election day, teams of NPP bicyclists wheeled the elderly and infirm to the polls. Senior officials of the party and the government patrolled the polling stations, offering handshakes and backslaps to party agents overseeing votes (the agents attended four separate training sessions on their election-day duties). Neither the DNC nor the two smaller parties could match the NPP campaign steamroller. Continuing splits within the NDC also hurt its chances, as it played catch-up without a full complement of campaign personalities on hand to offset the NPP's circulating collection of ruling party luminaries.

Not All Was Squeaky Clean

3. (SBU) Before, during and after the election, the NDC made its now traditional accusations of vote buying, suggesting the NPP freely distributed roofing tin, sacks of rice, clothing, and other items of use to impoverished constituents, as well as making cash payments to village elders and traditional leaders. While these accusations are unconfirmed, they are a traditional part of Ghanaian politics, and a practice the NDC excelled in when they ran the government. Indeed, all parties quietly engage in such petty trading with the electorate. Such pot-calling-the-kettle-black complaints do not register greatly with the Ghanaian public.

4. (SBU) Of greater concern for the integrity of the campaign, the Ghanaian National Police required the NDC to "reschedule" a series of campaign rallies for the duration of the Vice President's visit, the last two full days of the campaign. The ostensible reason for the ban on NDC rallies was the need to avoid "clashes" between the two camps. In effect, the NDC sat on its hands while the NPP brought in its heaviest campaign artillery at the very end of the contest. This was the third time out of four by-elections the NPP government imposed such "rescheduling," once again mirroring tactics employed by the NDC when it held the reins of power.

5. (SBU) There were also many rumors of the use of "Macho Men," campaign thugs, to intimidate the opposition. Both the NDC and NPP feared the use of such bullying tactics, and NPP officials told us they did indeed bring "youths" to town, strictly out of concern, so they

claimed, for NDC thugs intervening at polling stations. However, Polchief circulating on election day saw little sign of such Macho Men. Election Commission officials ran a competent and secure process, and police, army, and other security personnel oversaw polling in a neutral and even-handed manner.

Comment

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16. (C) With four by-election victories in a row (only one a close contest), the NPP appears nearly unbeatable in such concentrated contests, in which it can pour in resources and personnel far beyond the capacity of the other parties. While Vice Presidential visits, last minute electricity hook-ups, and even "honorariums" for local dignitaries are traditional campaign practices, enforced "rescheduling" of opposition political rallies is another order of political shenanigan entirely. It also appears to have been unnecessary, given the wide margin of victory. There are two more by-elections pending in the near future, one an NPP seat and one an NDC constituency. NPP victories in those campaigns will thoroughly discourage an opposition already psychologically on the ropes. The NPP is a popular government, its campaign team is experienced, well-resourced and determined, and it is intent on keeping its string of victories intact. Opposition success will be hard to come by. End comment.  
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